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ABSTRACT

This learning module, which is part of a management and supervisor training program for managers and supervisors employed at the Department of Energy's Waste Isolation Division, is designed to prepare trainees to communicate effectively with external organizations and the public. The following topics are covered in the module's individual sections: media relations (including guidelines for participating in television interviews); interfacing with the public (including guidelines for communication with coworkers when members of the public are present and communicating with legislators and their staff members); requesting information under the Freedom of Information Act; and participating in an audit conducted by the Department of Energy or some other regulatory body. Each section includes some or all of the following: enabling objectives, an exercise requiring trainees to evaluate a manager's effectiveness in a given scenario, and lists of good practices and practices to avoid. Contains eight references, a practice test and test answers. (MN)

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ED 395 164

Waste Isolation Division
Management and Supervisor Training (MAST) Program

INTERFACING WITH EXTERNAL ORGANIZATIONS AND THE PUBLIC
MAS-128

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TRAINEE INFORMATION

Trainee Name: _____

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A. INTRODUCTION

Terminal Objective

Upon completion of this module, the trainee will be able to communicate effectively with external organizations and the public.

Mastery of the terminal objective will be demonstrated by scoring 80 percent or higher on the module examination.

Communicating with the public and external groups regarding the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant (WIPP) is important to the success of Waste Isolation Division (WID). We can demonstrate all the proven technical aspects of the project over and over again; yet, if the "outside world" does not understand what we are doing, public support necessary for our success will not materialize. This module will provide you with information useful in communicating effectively with external organizations and the public.

B. MEDIA RELATIONS

Enabling Objectives

Upon completion of this section, the trainee will be able to perform the following:

1. Identify media relations practices to avoid.
2. Identify good media relations practices.
3. Given an employee-manager scenario, evaluate the manager's effectiveness concerning media relations.

It is important for the WIPP to maintain good relations with the media. Why? First, because the media has a profound impact on public opinion. And public opinion has a big impact on decisions made by Congress and other groups that determine the future of the WIPP. Second, we have a good story to tell. We're working on a solution to an existing national problem (how to safely dispose of transuranic waste). We need to make sure our efforts are communicated to the public through the media.

The prospect of a media interview can bring on a great deal of anxiety for a typical supervisor or manager. Images of bright lights, cameras, microphones, and difficult questions come to mind. Encounters with the media, however, need not be feared. Below are tips that will help you successfully manage your encounters with the media.

PRACTICES TO AVOID

- Failing to contact Media Relations before you meet with media representatives in a job-related capacity

  You should coordinate all formal media communications through Media Relations.

- Becoming too informal with media representatives

  Their job is to report, not to be your friend.

- Assuming that media representatives understand the nuclear industry, its practices and associated terminology

  Present your information as simply as possible. Don't force media representatives to translate obscure technical terms and complex information into something that John Q. Public can understand. Help reporters to do their job by keeping information you provide as clear and simple as possible. This helps alleviate the possibility of errors by a reporter.

- Pressuring media representatives not to publish a story

  This approach can turn an otherwise ordinary story into a front-page story. Furthermore, applying pressure to stop a story seldom works. It is an affront to journalism's code of ethics and the First Amendment.

- Publicly disagreeing with a negative report in the media

  This can keep public attention focused on the negative issue. It is usually best to let negative stories fade into the past and to focus on moving forward in a positive direction, generating favorable stories.

- Arguing with a media representative

  Arguing doesn't get you anything, even if you "win." Stay assertive and upbeat, even when faced with an aggressive audience. Avoid getting defensive. Emphasize positive facts instead of telling someone why their position is wrong.

- Allowing your personal feelings to enter into an interview situation

  There may be occasions when you do not fully agree with a decision made by senior management. Interviews are definitely not the arena in which to air such differences of opinion. Keep information you provide in interviews factual.

GOOD MEDIA PRACTICES

- Coordinate requests for interviews with Media Relations

  If called at work by a media representative requesting an interview on a WIPP topic, instruct the person to coordinate the interview through Media Relations.

- Respond quickly to requests for information

  You may be asked by Media Relations to assist in providing information to the media. If you are, respond quickly. Reporters have deadlines to meet. Providing accurate information quickly is one of the best ways to earn a reporter's gratitude and respect. This also helps in minimizing one-sided, unbalanced stories.

- Identify your audience

  This is one of the first steps to take prior to any communication transaction. Determine media representatives' level of understanding of your topic.

- Identify topics likely to come up and have pertinent facts and information ready

- Study, practice, and use techniques that help get ideas across in interviews such as the following:

  - Using short sentences
  - Repeating key phrases
  - Avoiding "no comment" answers
  - Using examples and analogies

  Media Relations can help you prepare these "mini messages."

- Use "I"-statements if you have responsibility for the topic under discussion; then reporters will recognize that you know what you're talking about

  For example, "I managed that project and I..."

- Remember that there are some questions that you should not answer

  If asked a question about something outside your area of responsibility, respond by saying something like, "I'm not the best person to answer that question," or "I'd rather not speculate," or "It is not appropriate for us to discuss matters which are the subject of a lawsuit," etc. Persistent media persons may continue to press you for the information. They may use one of the following strategies:

  - Getting angry (or at least pretending to be angry)
  - Bluffing: "Opposition group XYZ says that..."
  - Asking the same question in different ways

In each of these instances, keep returning to your key message and, if necessary, remind the reporter why you would rather not divulge the information.

- Provide handouts which summarize key points, especially when complicated, technical, or financial data is involved

Remember the basic guideline presented in MAS-106, Communications: It is the sender's responsibility to ensure that the receiver has gotten the message. In this case, the receiver is the media representative. Handouts and memorandums can help media representatives understand what you said and accurately report the facts.

- When possible, have a fellow employee accompany you to interviews

The employee can act as a "helper," listening to what you say and clarifying when needed. Helpers should use phrases such as, "Let me add to that" and avoid phrases such as, "That's not right."

- Remember that it is not the job of a media representative to write positive stories about the WIPP

The job of a news representative is to provide information to the public - from more than one angle. A quote from Kent MacDougall, an expert on news media coverage of business, helps illustrate this point:

> Business and the news media must also recognize that some
> tension, even conflict, is inherent in business-media relations. Expecting total harmony between the two is as undesirable as it is unrealistic. In a pluralistic society, business and the media serve different functions. Business produces goods and services and provides jobs.
> The media have a public responsibility to make sure business acts responsibly.

- Be honest

We, as representatives of the WIPP, have an obligation to make sure information we provide to the public is true.

- If you are asked a question that you can't answer, don't try to "fake it"

Tell the media representative that you don't know but you will find out the answer. Then provide the answer at your earliest opportunity. Don't stonewall. But remember: most media persons have unforgiving deadlines which must be met.

- Redirect media representatives who use leading questions

  For instance, a reporter may ask, "Haven't you had five roof falls at the WIPP since 1990?" (yes) "Well then how can you say the WIPP is safe if the roofs are falling in?" (now you will be back to defending the WIPP again). A better response to give after the first question ("Haven't you had...") is to say something like, "The WIPP is a first of a kind experimental program. We've been conducting experiments in the underground to monitor salt creep rates. Some of the rooms used in these experimental operations were purposely heated and left unsupported by roof bolts. The roof falls were planned, monitored, and evaluated..."

- Maintain control over your emotions

  Reporters may write or say things that you don't agree with. If they do, it is best to keep your emotions in check. If you don't, you'll probably regret it later. The media loves to report stories involving angry exchanges. Get angry in private. Don't vent your anger on reporters or editors.

- If you don't want something reported in the news, don't say it

  There's no such thing as "off the record" or "just between you and me."

TV INTERVIEWS

TV interviews can be tough because you must concentrate on what you say <u>and</u> how you say it. How you act, the tone of your voice, the clothing you wear, and the setting of the interview are all important. The following tips will help you project a positive image and enhance your credibility.

- Choose the proper setting for the interview

  Make sure the area is large enough to accommodate the camera operators, lighting, and reporters.

- Try to keep your nonverbal behavior natural

  Audiences will regard you as credible and authentic if your facial expressions reflect what is appropriate for the topic being discussed.

- What you wear reflects on you

  According to public relations expert Ed Shiller, "Neatness and cleanliness are essential. It is difficult to regard someone who wears wrinkled trousers or skirts, has ring around the collar and frayed lapels as authoritative, knowledgeable and truthful..."

- Direct your answers and comments to the interviewer, not the camera

  Think of the camera as a third party who is eavesdropping on the conversation between you and the interviewer.

- Don't begin your comments for the camera until you are completely ready

  Wait until your eyes have adjusted to the light; rapid blinking or squinting in the face of camera lights will distract the audience away from your spoken message. And don't feel compelled to answer a question until you are comfortable with your answer. The time you spend considering questions and silently formulating answers will almost always be edited out for broadcast purposes.

- Keep gestures and movements to a minimum

  The challenge is to stay relaxed and minimize your movements. During a normal TV interview, the camera is focused on your upper body only. This tends to amplify your movements. Therefore, it is best to emulate TV newscasters and remain largely motionless.

- If seated at a desk, sit up straight, lean slightly forward, and rest your forearms on the desktop

  Avoid sitting on the edge of your chair as this will make you appear stiff and nervous. If you don't know what to do with your hands, clasp them. Keep both of your feet resting in a comfortable position flat on the floor. This pose will help you remain still and appear confident, controlled, and alert.

- If your desk looks disorderly, clean it up

- Put sensitive and confidential documents away

- If you're sitting somewhere without a desk or table between you and the camera, cross your legs

  This is a modest pose which will help you to sit upright without looking awkward.

- If you are standing for a TV interview:
  - Stand comfortably but with good posture

    Avoid hunching your shoulders and keep your feet about six inches apart. Placing one foot slightly ahead of the other can help you keep from swaying.

  - Plan what to do with your hands

    Figuring out what to do with your hands can be a problem. According to Ed Shiller, "Your best bet may be to put one hand in your trouser or skirt pocket, with the other arm held at your side or slightly bent at the elbow. Then you can occasionally rotate the wrist of your free arm or flick the fingers of that hand to emphasize a point. These minimal movements will project confidence, but not aggressiveness or arrogance. If you place your hand in your pocket, keep it still. Don't create an annoying diversion by rattling your change."

Following the guidelines provided in this section will help you survive encounters with media persons. When you know about media interviews in advance, seek assistance from Media Relations.

CRITICAL INCIDENT
EFFECTIVE PERFORMANCE

Occurrence: A WID employee was contacted at home by a reporter. The reporter first asked questions about Carlsbad in general and then asked questions about the WIPP. When asked how things were going at the WIPP, the employee replied that "things are going fine, but if you have specific questions you need to talk to External and Governmental Affairs." After the reporter left, the employee called the Manager of External and Governmental Affairs at home to let her know what had transpired.

Impacts: (1) The employee maintained professional, cordial relations with the reporter. (2) The employee expressed his opinion without misrepresenting WID or the WIPP. (3) External and Governmental Affairs was prepared for contact with the reporter.

Lessons learned: (1) Interactions with the media can be successfully handled by any employee who follows sound media relations practices.

C. INTERFACING WITH THE PUBLIC

Enabling Objectives

Upon completion of this section, the trainee will be able to perform the following:

1. Identify good practices to follow when interfacing with the public.
2. Identify practices to avoid when interfacing with the public.
3. Given an employee-manager scenario, evaluate the manager's effectiveness at interfacing with the public.

It is important to understand public perceptions concerning credibility. Credibility refers to how believable a person or organization is perceived to be. Firms in the nuclear and environmental industries are sometimes stereotypically perceived by the public as willing to abuse the environment whenever it is in their self-interest. Environmental groups, on the other hand, usually are perceived favorably for their pro-environment positions. The public generally rates the credibility of environmental groups significantly higher than that of "industry." Thus, environmental groups have an advantage over organizations such as WID when communicating with the public. This advantage, however, is not insurmountable. By following effective communication practices we can effectively interface with the public.

GOOD PRACTICES

- Don't discount the importance of someone's viewpoint (even though it is different from your own)

  You may encounter members of the public who are ill-informed about or opposed to the WIPP. In these instances, it is important to listen before you attempt to persuade. Acknowledge that you understand the person's viewpoint before trying to explain your own viewpoint. People will be hesitant to listen to your explanation if you don't take the time to listen to and understand their feelings, perceptions, and opinions. Communication is a two-way process.

- Remember that the public consists of a heterogeneous mix of persons with varying attitudes, opinions, and belief systems

  The E. Bruce Harrison Company said it best in their Environmental Communication and Public Relations Handbook: "There is no such entity as 'the public;' instead, there are many publics, each with its own interests, needs, concerns, priorities, preferences, and organizations." What this quotation emphasizes is that different subsections of the public require different communication strategies.

- Be honest

  This is a recurring theme in this module because it is so important.

- Be direct

  Avoid long, drawn-out answers; these often sound less credible than shorter, simpler answers.

- Provide an answer to all questions, even if you have to get back to the questioner by telephone or letter

- Say "no" if necessary

  Some members of the public will make unusual requests or ask you for favors. Don't be afraid to set legitimate limits.

- Participate in community activities

  For instance, you could attend public information meetings or volunteer for the Speaker's Bureau or the Shadowing Program. This sends the "good neighbor" message that you are interested in participating in the life of our community.

- Remember that our employees are our best public opinion resource

  Managers and supervisors are not the only persons who conduct communications with the public. All WID employees act as unofficial ambassadors for the WIPP Project. Research indicates that every person influences the opinion of seven other persons. Because our employees influence the opinions of thousands of people, they are an invaluable public opinion resource.

PRACTICES TO AVOID

- Evading questions

  Most people can easily detect evasive maneuvers made to avoid answering a question.

- Assuming someone is ignorant about the WIPP

  Members of the public often possess a surprising amount of knowledge about the WIPP.

- Making commitments you can't meet

  Don't make commitments for another WID department. If asked to do so, tell the requestor that you will have to do some checking before you can make a commitment.

- Getting into arguments

  Friendly debates are all right, but don't get into heated exchanges with anyone. Maintain your composure, even when you are faced with verbally abusive people. Don't "take the low road" and sink to the abuser's level.

- Conducting business conversations in inappropriate locations

  Avoid talking about topics which might be misinterpreted in public or in front of visitors. Messages from conversations are usually distorted as they are repeated from person to person. For that reason, the site cafeteria is not an appropriate place for conducting work meetings or debating technical issues. Site visitors and other persons, who may misunderstand what you are talking about, often use the cafeteria.

CRITICAL INCIDENT
INEFFECTIVE PERFORMANCE

Occurrence: Two managers were arguing about a technical issue in the site cafeteria. It was evident from the managers' conversation that there were problems with the program under discussion. The managers happened to be sitting next to WIPP site visitors.

Impact: The visitors overheard the conversation. One visitor asked a WID employee escorting the group, "Will what those guys were talking about have an effect on the opening of the WIPP?" The WID employee tried to downplay the significance of what was overheard, but the employee felt uncomfortable while doing so. The final impact of this occurrence is unknown - it will depend on how many other people hear about the conversation from the visitors. It is clear, however, that the visitors' confidence in the technical soundness of the WIPP was damaged.

Lessons learned: (1) Being discreet means using good judgement in your conduct, especially in speech. Persons described as discreet know when to be silent. It is important for WID managers, supervisors, and employees to be discreet. (2) Conduct conversations in appropriate locales. The site cafeteria and restaurants normally are not proper forums for business conversations.

As U.S. citizens, WID employees have the right to free speech. This includes the right to write letters to the editor and to represent their views in other ways. Such activities, however, should not be pursued while at work. If you notice your employees pursuing their opinions on company time, inform them that such activities must be conducted during non-work hours. It is also forbidden for WID employees to represent their opinions as Westinghouse Electric Corporation (WEC) positions. For instance, if an employee wrote a letter to the editor stating, "We at Westinghouse believe that...", this would be a violation of WID policy. These warnings, however, should not be misinterpreted as an attempt to discourage employees from airing their views on their own time.

COMMUNICATING WITH LEGISLATORS AND THEIR STAFF MEMBERS

Most WID employees will seldom, if ever, interact directly with legislators in a job-related capacity. But a basic understanding of how to properly communicate with legislators and their staff members is important. Legislatures, both national and state, pass many bills affecting the WIPP, and legislators will continue to significantly influence our future.

A bill is a draft of a law presented to a legislature for enactment. Bills are introduced by individual legislators, but the essential activities that move legislation through the system take place largely in committees and subcommittees. Various federal and state committees, subcommittees, and task forces affecting the WIPP include the following:

U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

- Committee on Appropriations; Subcommittee on Energy and Water Development - responsible for annual appropriations
- Committee on Armed Services; DOE Defense Nuclear Facilities Panel - responsible for legislation and general oversight (e.g., land withdrawal)
- Committee on Energy and Commerce; Subcommittee on Energy and Power - responsible for legislation and general oversight (e.g., land withdrawal)
- Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs; Subcommittee on Energy and the Environment - responsible for legislation and general oversight (e.g., land withdrawal)
- Committee on Government Operations; Subcommittee on Environment, Energy, and Natural Resources - responsible for general oversight

U.S. SENATE

- Committee on Appropriations; Subcommittee on Energy and Water Development - annual appropriations
- Committee on Energy and Natural Resources - responsible for legislation and general oversight (e.g., land withdrawal)
- Committee on Governmental Affairs - responsible for general oversight

NEW MEXICO STATE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

- Committee on Energy and Natural Resources - responsible for legislation that impacts the WIPP, including environmental concerns

NEW MEXICO STATE SENATE

- Committee on Conservation - responsible for legislation that impacts the WIPP, including environmental concerns

NEW MEXICO JOINT LEGISLATIVE COMMITTEES

- Committee on Radioactive and Hazardous Materials - responsible for hearings, recommendations, recommended legislation, reviewing task force agreements, and other matters concerning the WIPP

- Committee on Energy, Natural Resources, and the Environment - responsible for hearings and recommended legislation during the interim concerning energy and environmental issues

NEW MEXICO EXECUTIVE BRANCH

- Task Force on Radioactive and Hazardous Waste - responsible for oversight and negotiation with Federal agencies

Individual legislators employ staff members to assist them by collecting information, preparing draft legislation, and providing advice on technical matters. These congressional staff members (staffers) include scientists, economists, engineers, lawyers and others. Staffers may have different motives and objectives than legislators; however, their political views are often aligned to the legislators who employ them. Remember that staffers are the eyes and ears of legislators. They should be treated with the same respect and professionalism as legislators.

Formal communications with legislators and staffers are handled by the DOE. WID employees, however, sometimes are involved in responding to congressional inquiries. If you are asked to respond to a congressional inquiry, treat the response as a high priority. The DOE usually works on a very tight schedule in providing responses to congressional inquiries. Any delay reflects poorly on WID. Provide your response quickly and accurately. Allow leeway in the response schedule for necessary reviews and remember that coordination is vital. Find out what other groups involved in the issue of the inquiry are saying. Whenever possible, coordinate with these groups to send a consistent message. Consistency reinforces the message received by legislators. Opponents of the WIPP can capitalize on inconsistent and conflicting messages.

Legislators and staffers must handle a broad range of issues; this precludes them from becoming specialists in any one particular area, i.e., nuclear waste. Therefore, it is a good practice to avoid confusing syntax and unnecessary technical terms in written responses to congressional inquiries.

Legislators and their staffers occasionally visit the WIPP. During these visits, WID managers, supervisors, or other employees may be asked specific questions. These questions should be answered succinctly without excess verbiage. If a question is raised for which an answer is unknown or the answer is known to be politically sensitive, put the questioner in touch with External and Governmental Affairs. Formal communications with legislators and their staffers should be handled according to the guidelines provided in the "Formal Communications" section of this module.

After legislators and their staffers leave, WID employees should write down questions asked and answers given during the visit. This information should then be forwarded to External and Governmental Affairs. If clarification or correction is necessary, External and Governmental Affairs will coordinate an amended response.

D. FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT REQUESTS

Enabling Objectives

Upon completion of this section, the trainee will be able to perform the following:

1. Identify good practices to follow when responding to Freedom of Information Act requests.

2. Identify practices to avoid when responding to Freedom of Information Act requests.

3. Given an employee-manager scenario, evaluate the manager's effectiveness in responding to Freedom of Information Act requests.

The Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) entitles U.S. citizens to request any record maintained by a federal Executive branch agency (such as the DOE). The agency must release the requested record unless information contained in the record falls into one of nine exempt categories. For example, information may be classified as exempt if its release could compromise national security or foreign policy, violate privacy laws, disclose trade secrets or geological data concerning wells, and the like. For exempt categories, agencies may disclose the requested record, but they are not compelled to do so.

Responses to FOIA requests pertaining to the WIPP are coordinated by the DOE. Requests pass from the Albuquerque Field Office to the WIPP Project Site Office (WPSO) to WID (as appropriate). WID's point of contact for handling FOIA requests is Technical Integration. Technical Integration receives FOIA requests and makes an initial determination of whether or not the requested information can be disclosed. Here, "information" refers to written items such as records and documents, not information in our heads or personal notes.

For the purposes of the FOIA, WID does not disclose draft reports or confidential, sensitive, or proprietary information. Internal audits, for example, are not subject to disclosure until they have been closed out. To date, WID has provided information under the FOIA concerning waste characterization, contracts, how project dollars are spent, and TRUPACT-II shipment routes and schedules. If the requested information is subject to disclosure, Technical Integration routes the request to the WID department that can best provide the requested information. After the information is compiled, it is reviewed by the cognizant senior manager and by WID's Legal Counsel. Technical Integration then forwards the response to the WPSO.

WID will not initiate contact with or reply to FOIA requestors nor will WID transmit any records directly or indirectly to FOIA requestors. If you receive a letter requesting information under the FOIA, forward it to Technical Integration immediately. Technical Integration will ensure that the request is processed through the appropriate channels. If you are asked to provide information in response to a FOIA request by Technical Integration, do the following:

- Pay attention to the response deadline and respond in a timely manner

  There is a legal time limit for responding to FOIA requests. Providing information for FOIA requests is a service WID provides to the DOE, and it is important that we respond promptly.

- Provide complete and accurate information

  Do not conceal information, even if you think the information will reflect poorly on yourself or WID. If you have a concern about information you are providing, "flag it" and/or do not hesitate to bring it to the attention of Technical Integration.

- If the information doesn't exist, don't generate it!

  The FOIA provides a mechanism for the public to obtain <u>existing</u> information; it does not grant license to request or expect information to be generated.

- Keep track of the amount of time spent in preparing information (searching files, copying, etc.) for FOIA responses

  The DOE has the right, in certain instances, to charge requestors for the cost of assembling information.

Additional information is contained in WID Management Policy 1.5, "Freedom of Information Act." Questions related to the FOIA should be directed to Technical Integration.

E. CONDUCT OF AUDITS

Enabling Objectives

Upon completion of this section, the trainee will be able to perform the following:

1. Identify good audit practices.
2. Identify audit practices to avoid.
3. Given an employee-manager scenario, evaluate the manager's effectiveness concerning audits.

Audits are a continuing part of life at WID. Audit reports are an important source of feedback on how well we are doing as a division. Our main customer, the Department of Energy, uses audit reports as an indication of how well we are performing our function as the management and operating contractor for the WIPP. Thus, handling audits and responding to auditors will continue to be key components of your position. Listed below are some dos and don'ts that will help you during audits.

GOOD AUDIT PRACTICES

- Audit groups do not always contact Regulatory Assurance to schedule audits at the WIPP. Sometimes they contact individual WID managers. If you are contacted directly, find out the following:
  - Who are the auditors
  - When they would like to visit
  - The purpose of the audit
  - What they would like to review
  - With whom they would like to talk
  - Who their contact person is

  Seek specific, detailed information. For example, if the audit group says it plans to look at records, find out what type of records. If the audit is being conducted by an external (non-WID) organization, promptly notify Regulatory Assurance. Regulatory Assurance will coordinate the visit and notify the other departments involved in the audit.

- Get background information on the individuals who will be conducting the audit. Find out the auditors' areas of expertise and their areas of concern. This kind of information can help ensure that the auditors' concerns are addressed during the audit.

- Follow up before auditors arrive to ensure that the people the auditors want to talk to will be available.

- Define restrictions applicable to auditors up front. If you don't set ground rules, auditors may view restrictions as a defense mechanism designed to thwart them. Tell auditors early on that they must be under continuous escort. If they will be reviewing confidential information, tell them beforehand that they can look at the information but that they cannot have copies. Be sure to explain why the restrictions apply.

- Represent WID with a positive attitude. Be proud of your accomplishments, but avoid giving an impression of arrogance.

- Listen carefully to auditors' comments and questions. Seek clarification as needed. You cannot respond effectively until you understand.

- When responding to auditors, use the following guidelines:

  - Be straightforward

  - Answer only the question you were asked. Don't volunteer additional information

  - Stick to the topic under discussion

- Maintain a professional, arms-length relationship with auditors. Some auditors will try "the buddy approach" to get you to criticize other departments, individuals, or processes. Don't lose sight of why they are here (to audit WID). Other auditors behave belligerently in an attempt to put you on the defensive. Don't fall prey to this ploy.

- When auditors challenge something, ask what requirement or standard they are basing their challenge on. Require auditors to base their challenges on requirements rather than on feelings or opinions. Some auditors will challenge things in your area of responsibility to see if you understand applicable requirements.

- Maintain a diary of all conversation with auditors. Make notes of what auditors say. These notes often prove useful later when trying to interpret recommendations or findings. Write down all information requested by auditors.

- Develop and distribute minutes of all formal meetings with auditors (entrance, progress, and exit). The reason for doing this is to document understandings reached in meetings, i.e., concurrence or nonconcurrence with a finding or adequacy/inadequacy of an explanation. Also, sometimes auditors do not clearly communicate their needs. Written minutes will show that the auditor did or did not ask for certain information.

- Double check the accuracy of data before providing it to the auditors.

- Within reason, provide information as quickly as possible. Deliberately slowing down the providing of information will only delay the completion of the audit.

- Work with auditors to give them information in the best available format. Don't withhold a computer printout simply because an auditor doesn't know it exists. However, be careful not to supply more than auditors ask for.

- Maintain a log and, where possible, copies of all documents given to auditors.

- Sometimes employees temporarily freeze up when questioned by auditors. For example, auditors often ask employees what type of training they have had. On occasion, an employee will not remember attending training courses. In such instances, perform the following:

  - Don't embarrass the employee. After leaving the employee, tell the auditor that you will verify the accuracy of the employee's statement

  - Verify (check to see if the employee's statement was accurate)

  - Follow-up by informing the auditor whether or not the employee's statement was accurate

  - Offer to let the auditor verify that your information is correct by reviewing relevant records, i.e., the employee's training file

  This process will eliminate many unnecessary audit findings.

- Have a representative from your department attend audit close-out meetings. This gives your department a chance to prevent some auditor concerns from becoming findings.

- Share audit results with your employees. You cannot close out all audit findings on your own; your employees should be an integral part of the improvement process.

AUDIT PRACTICES TO AVOID

- Trying to orchestrate audits to prevent auditors from talking to employees or having access to required information. Experienced auditors can detect such maneuvers.

- Trying to overload the auditor with extraneous or irrelevant information to throw the auditor "off track." Experienced auditors can detect this, also.

- Lying or fabricating information -- it'll come back to haunt you. Don't try to "cover your tracks;" admit it when you are not in compliance.

- Pressuring employees to respond in certain ways. Employees resent such attempts to control their behavior.

- Trying to talk about something you don't know about. This can cause problems for other departments. If asked about something outside your area of responsibility, contact the appropriate subject matter expert or cognizant manager.

- Being defensive. It is essential that you accept input from auditors and other experts without being defensive or uncompromising. Listen to constructive feedback and treat it as information rather than criticism.

- Allowing auditors to violate policies or procedures. Don't let auditors violate facility access requirements, touch off-limits equipment, or remove confidential, sensitive, or proprietary information.

- Showing auditors more than they ask to see. Most auditors visit WID with a fixed purpose and scope. Showing them more may confuse them, and confusion can result in audit concerns. Showing more can also expand the scope of an audit or lead to follow-up audits.

- Airing "dirty laundry" in front of auditors. Resolve problems with other departments the right way - privately, directly, assertively, and cooperatively.

- Complaining to auditors. Auditors aren't here to listen to your problems.

- Blaming someone else for your problems. Never point out another department's inadequacies to cover yourself. This is detrimental to WID and will damage your relations with employees in the other department.

- Provoking the hostility of auditors by being belligerent, arrogant, or secretive. As a general rule, auditors visit WID to help us, not to hurt us. Treat auditors as you would like to be treated.

- Fraternizing with auditors. While it is helpful to develop rapport and a good working relationship with auditors, you should not socialize after hours with auditors. Avoid all appearances of either accepting or offering anything, including favors, which could be construed by an outsider as being a gratuity. For example, it is inappropriate and inadvisable to suggest or hint at possible future employment for a contracted auditor. And don't consume an auditor's time with idle chatter. Many government audit staffs are prohibited from even having lunch with auditees, even if everyone pays for their own meal. Avoid putting auditors on the spot or in a position where they have to decline invitations.

Information contained in this section will help you do well in audits. The best way to do well in audits, however, is for you and your employees to do your jobs properly. Stay aware of and meet requirements affecting your department. The process for tracking audit findings and recommendations until closure is outlined in WP 15-057, "External Oversight Agency Appraisal Tracking."

F. CONCLUSION

Maintaining an effective interface with external organizations and the public is one of WID's most important performance objectives. We are expected by the DOE to maintain an effective and proactive stance with respect to community relations. You are an important part of this effort. You can assist by applying the principles and practices contained in this module. Review applicable sections of the module whenever you foresee challenging encounters with external organizations or the public.

G. MODULE REFERENCES

Environmental Communication and Public Relations Handbook, E. Bruce Harrison Company, Inc., 1988

The Business-Media Relationship: Countering Misconceptions and Distrust by D. Finn, 1981

Managing the Media by E. Shiller, 1989

Notes on Media Relations by B. Farrell, WID, 1991

Notes on Congressional Committees and Subcommittees by R. Guymon, WID, 1992

Neither Business Nor Media All Wrong But Some Tension All Right by K. MacDougall, Los Angeles Times, November 30, 1980

External Oversight Agency Appraisal Tracking, WP 15-057, WID, 1990

Freedom of Information Act, Management Policy, WID

H. PRACTICE TEST

1. A manager was called at work by a media representative with questions. The media representative requested an interview with the manager. Which of the following is the best response the manager could give the media representative?

   a. "We're not allowed to talk to media representatives. You may be able to schedule an interview through Public Information Programs."

   b. "It is our policy that media requests be coordinated by Media Relations. I'd be glad to transfer your call or give you the phone number."

   c. "Yes, come on over; we can meet right away."

   d. "I'll be happy to meet with you and provide answers to your questions, but this is a busy month for us. Can I possibly meet with you next month?"

   (B.2)

2. A WID employee was meeting with the public as a representative of the WIPP for the Speaker's Bureau. While answering questions, the employee gave long answers to be sure that she got her point across. Was this a GOOD practice? Why?

   a. YES - research has shown that long answers are better

   b. YES - long answers usually sound more credible than short answers

   c. NO - short, direct answers are usually best

   d. NO - the employee,should have provided written answers to all questions

   (C.3)

3. A supervisor stated that "Formal communications with legislators and staffers are handled by WID's Governmental Relations Section." Was this an accurate statement? Why?

   a. YES - Governmental Relations is WID's point of contact for all formal communication with government officials

   b. YES - Governmental Relations is WID's point of contact for all formal communications with non-WEC personnel

   c. NO - formal communications with legislators and staffers are handled by Public Information Programs

   d. NO - formal communications with legislators and staffers are handled by the DOE

   (C.3)

4. A manager was asked to provide information in response to a FOIA request. Since written information on the topic of the request did not exist, the manager had his employees produce a written document to provide the requested information. Was this a GOOD practice? Why?

   a. YES - the FOIA requires that written records be produced when they do not exist

   b. YES - the FOIA grants license to request information to be generated

   c. NO - WID is exempt from the FOIA

   d. NO - information should not be generated in response to FOIA requests

   (D.3)

5. During an audit, a manager showed auditors only items they asked to see. Was this a GOOD practice? Why?

   a. YES - the manager was following recommended audit practices

   b. YES - managers should be secretive during audits in order to protect WID

   c. NO - showing auditors only what they ask to see often results in an expanded audit scope

   d. NO - showing auditors only what they ask to see usually results in audit findings because auditors resent such maneuvers

   (E.3)

6. To avoid sounding condescending, a manager was careful to converse with media representatives just as he would with one of his fellow managers. The manager used technical terms and acronyms freely. Was this a GOOD practice? Why?

   a. YES - the manager was following recommended media relations practices

   b. YES - media representatives usually are knowledgeable specialists on subjects about which they report

   c. NO - it is best to present information simply and intelligibly

   d. NO - managers are not authorized to speak with media representatives; this is handled exclusively by the Media Relations Manager or the Manager of External and Governmental Affairs

   (B.3)

7. A manager heard that a local newspaper was planning to print an extremely negative story about the WIPP. The manager called the newspaper and stated that he felt it would be inappropriate to publish the story. The manager reminded the newspaper editor that WID spent a great deal of money advertising in the newspaper. Was this a GOOD practice? Why?

   a. YES - the manager was proactively protecting the interests of the WIPP

   b. YES - media representatives respond favorably to this type of influence

   c. NO - WID personnel should not pressure media representatives to kill stories

   d. NO - the manager should have warned the newspaper editor that publishing the story might result in a lawsuit

   (B.3)

8. A manager gave each of his exempt employees a Performance Management System (PMS) objective to write to five legislators expressing their personal support for the WIPP. Was this a GOOD practice? Why?

   a. YES - the future success of the WIPP depends upon gaining support from legislators

   b. YES - this is a good example of a measurable objective

   c. NO - WID employees are prohibited from communicating with legislators while on company or personal time

   d. NO - this was an inappropriate objective; employees should pursue such activities on their own time

   (C.2)

9. An employee received a letter requesting a record under the FOIA. The employee asked her manager what to do with the letter. The manager stated that the letter should be forwarded to Technical Integration right away. Was the manager's statement correct? Why?

   a. YES - WID's point of contact for handling FOIA requests is Technical Integration

   b. YES - all formal communications are reviewed by Technical Integration

   c. NO - WID's point of contact for handling FOIA requests is Public Information Programs

   d. NO - the requested record and letter should have been forwarded by the manager to the WPSO

   (D.3)

10. Two managers were debating whether a technical project in progress at the WIPP would be successful. The discussion continued through lunchtime. Since they were in a public restaurant, one of the managers suggested that the debate be deferred until they returned to the office. Was deferring the conversation a GOOD practice? Why?

   a. YES - WID policy prohibits employees, supervisors, and managers from discussing WIPP matters off the work site

   b. YES - the conversation could have been misinterpreted; the managers were using discretion

   c. NO - the managers were wasting valuable time which could have been spent resolving the debate

   d. NO - public places are the preferred environment for this type of conversation because other WIPP personnel are less likely to overhear what is being discussed

   (C.3)

ANSWERS AND FEEDBACK FOR PRACTICE TEST

1. b. "It is our policy that media requests be coordinated by Media Relations. I'd be glad to transfer your call or give you the phone number."

2. c. NO - short, direct answers are usually best

3. d. NO - formal communications with legislators and staffers are handled by the DOE

4. d. NO - information should not be generated in response to FOIA requests

5. a. YES - the manager was following recommended audit practices

6. c. NO - it is best to present information simply and intelligibly

7. c. NO - WID personnel should not pressure media representatives to kill stories

8. d. NO - this was an inappropriate objective; employees should pursue such activities on their own time

9. a. YES - WID's point of contact for handling FOIA requests is Technical Integration

10. b. YES - the conversation could have been misinterpreted; the managers were using discretion

If you scored 80 percent or higher on the practice test, you are ready to take the module examination; please proceed to Human Resources Development and Total Quality.

If you scored less than 80 percent on the practice test, please re-read the module and take the practice test again. If you still have questions, contact Human Resources Development and Total Quality.